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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/PPD, EUR/CARC

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SUBJECT: ARMENIA: MEDIA REACTION TO OSCE MINSK GROUP VISIT

Sensitive but unclassified, please protect accordingly.

SUMMARY

11. (SBU) The OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs visited Armenia October 3-4 as part of a regional trip aimed at renewing contact between Armenia and Azerbaijan on the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. On October 3, the co-chairs, together with Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairman in Office Andrzej Kasprzyk, held a press conference in Yerevan. The media widely covered the hour-long event, with virtually all television stations, radio stations, newspapers, and news agencies reporting on it. Media outlets focus mainly on the co-chairs' announcement that the Armenian and Azerbaijani foreign ministers had agreed to meet in Moscow on October 6. The media also provide extensive quotes from the co-chairs, including U.S. Co-Chair Matthew Bryza's request that the media be more careful to quote accurately and French Co-Chair Bernard Fassier's denial of reports that he said Nagorno-Karabakh should not be involved in the negotiations. While the media and the public appear to have regained some optimism with the disclosure of the basic principles and the planned meeting of the foreign ministers, if progress is not made in forthcoming meetings, it is likely that the pessimism that was present after Rambouillet and Bucharest will quickly return. END SUMMARY.

MEDIA FOCUS ON FOREIGN MINISTERS' MEETING

12. (U) The majority of media outlets focused on Russian Co-Chair Yuri Merzlyakov's statement that the main goal of the visit of the co-chairs was to achieve the renewal of direct contact between the sides, and that goal had been achieved since the Armenian and Azerbaijani foreign ministers had agreed to meet in Moscow on October 6. This announcement is the focus of RFE/RL's article entitled "Armenia, Azerbaijan Agree to Resume Talks," center-right newspaper Azg's article entitled "Oskanian-Mamedyarov Meeting to Take Place in Moscow on October 6," and government-run Hayastani Hanrapetutiun's report headlined "Yerevan-Baku Direct Contact is Restored."

NEWSPAPERS EXTENSIVELY QUOTE THE CO-CHAIRS

13. (U) Media outlets extensively quote the co-chairs on a variety of topics. Virtually all newspapers quote U.S. Co-Chair Matthew Bryza asking media outlets to be more careful to quote accurately. Bryza said, "If there is one factor, though, that is still underlying the difficulty in accelerating the process, it probably is a lack of trust between all the parties. And it's so important, in an effort to rebuild that confidence, to make sure we're quite careful about

citations of any of the participants in the process. And I note today two pretty significantly different interpretations of what President Aliyev said in his speech to the opening of parliament yesterday." (Note: Arminfo news agency reported that Aliyev said he would not accept "any compromise on Nagorno-Karabakh," while Azer-Press stated that he said he would not agree to a compromise that "was not for the good of the government of Azerbaijan and the people of Azerbaijan." End Note.) Hayastani Hanrapetutiu comments that, "It was lucky that representatives of the relevant Armenian media outlets were present at the press conference and showed the Azerbaijani article that it quoted in its report."

14. (U) Media outlets also widely cover Bryza's response to a question about President Aliyev's statements at the October 2 opening of the Azerbaijani parliament. Bryza stated, "All I can say about the specific quotes that you cited is that there is no military settlement to the Karabakh conflict." Arminfo news agency entitles one of its reports on the press conference, "Matthew Bryza: A Military Solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict Does Not Exist."

15. (U) The Armenian press reports broadly on the co-chairs' response to a journalist who asked Fassier to explain whether he stated in Baku that Nagorno-Karabakh should not be involved in the negotiations, and who asked Bryza to clarify what he said in Baku about the GUAM proposal that the UN become involved in mediating conflicts in the post-Soviet space. Hayastani Hanrapetutiu states, "The French and American co-chairs could not hide their delight when an Armenian journalist tried to clarify whether their statements in Baku were said the way they were represented in the Azeri press." Newspapers quote both co-chairs as denying inaccurate press reports. Azg newspaper says that Fassier responded to the claim that he said Nagorno-Karabakh should not be involved in the negotiations by saying, "I totally reject it." Regarding the GUAM proposal, Hayastani Hanrapetutiu says that, "Referring to the issue, Matthew

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Bryza expressed his disappointment regarding the misinterpretation of his remarks on the GUAM initiative by the Azerbaijani press."

GOVERNMENT-RUN NEWSPAPER POSITIVE ABOUT VISIT...

16. (U) In its article on the press conference, government-run Hayastani Hanrapetutiu takes an optimistic approach to the conflict settlement process. One section of its lengthy article states, "It should be mentioned that the last visit of the co-chairs took place four months ago when, together with the deputy ministers of foreign affairs, the co-chairs released a short statement. Yesterday's press conference lasted one hour. The length of the conference and the humor exhibited are evidence of their good mood. Indeed, they reached their main goals--the restoration of direct Armenian-Azerbaijani contact."

...WHILE SENSATIONALIST DAILY IS PESSIMISTIC

17. (U) Sensationalist daily Haykakan Zhamanak, however, takes a pessimistic view of the progress of the negotiations. The newspaper quotes French Co-Chair Bernard Fassier as saying, "But we are convinced that even if there is only a one percent chance to make the peace, this would be sufficient to try." In response to this statement, the newspaper comments, "This statement made by Mr. Fassier is perhaps the best expression of the pessimistic mood of the co-chairs. Although the co-chairs have many grounds on which to be pessimistic, the most important is that the negotiations are continuing based on the same document and settlement principles on which the Armenian and Azerbaijani presidents did not agree during their last meeting in Bucharest on June 5. This means that there is no basis to think that during a new round of negotiations regarding the same document the parties will succeed."

COMMENT

¶ 8. (SBU) It appears that the disclosure of the basic principles of the negotiations and the announcement of the upcoming meeting of the foreign ministers have rejuvenated some optimism and interest by the press and the public on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. Opposition newspaper Aravot, for example, comments that, "Yesterday the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs presented their regular press conference, and once again provided literally the same answers to the same questions from journalists. However, this press conference, as compared to previous ones, was somewhat 'beneficial' in the sense that it was the first one following the announcement of the basic principles." While some optimism seems to have been renewed, the media are also questioning what progress can be made if the same document is on the negotiation table. If there is a lack of progress at the upcoming meetings, it is likely that the press and the public will easily return to the pessimistic mood that was prevalent following the failed meetings in Rambouillet and Bucharest.

GODFREY